

***Going Beyond the Text: A Look into The Glass Castle and Educated***

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on simply going beyond a text and instead analyzing and researching the cultural and historical prevalence occurring during the text's timeline. This process examines how a text moves around time and space and correlates how this movement is illustrated by geographical locations, cultural practices, and the specific time period. It pushes the idea of movement beyond the text itself. Through this research, two memoirs will not only be measured through the historical critic lens but the geographical lens as well. *The Glass Castle* written by Jeannette Walls, detailing events in the 1960s and 1970s, provides insight on the unconventional upbringing of Jeannette and her three siblings under the hands of their dysfunctional parents. The timeline, geography, and history will be examined throughout the memoir. Along with *The Glass Castle*, Tara Westover's memoir *Educated*, detailing events taking place in the 1990s and early 2000s, will be examined in the same aforementioned context. These two memoirs in correlation with their timeline, historical prevalence, and geographical locations will offer in-depth and new insight into these women, their families, and the memoirs themselves.

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to thank my family for keeping me motivated to finish this mountain of an endeavor as well as all the things they've helped me out in life. I received a lot of encouragement and support from them over the course of my college career. I want to thank Dr. Ben Bascom for all the incredible advice he gave me while writing this thesis. He made sense of my ideas when I couldn't.

### **Process Analysis Statement**

Throughout my process of writing this thesis, I knew I wanted to explore the varying approaches when it comes to reading a text. I believe reading a text is much more than just reading the book from start to finish. There are multiple levels and avenues that a book offers for the reader. A text is more than just words on paper. By choosing to study memoirs for this thesis, it allowed a unique insight into the issues I wanted to discuss—poverty and unconventional lifestyles. Memoirs give the truest insight to someone's experience in a variety of situations.

This thesis required research on the background of each author, Tara Westover and Jeannette Walls. After the initial research of the memoirists, an intense reading of each memoir inevitably happened. While reading each memoir, I took intricate notes about historical events mentioned by Westover or Walls during their recollection of their childhoods. These notes would help compile a list of historical and relevant events that framed my additional research, enabling me to understand the memoir and the author as a whole. Looking at the poverty occurring through both memoirs' timelines gave an insight into the troubles they faced. Along with these notes, I began to notice certain characteristic patterns happening within each family member that could be further studied using the psychoanalytical lens. This led to a deeper understanding of why certain family members acted in a certain manner.

During this process of interpreting two memoirs and conducting research to develop a deeper insight, I learned a lot about the value of going beyond just the text of the memoirs—hence, the name of my thesis. It's common to quickly consume a novel or memoir because you are caught up in the story and emotion. Adding the historical and psychoanalytical lenses puts the memoirs into a brighter light, so you can obtain a fuller picture of Westover and Walls, a picture opening up new interpretations and opinions about a piece of literature.

“Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery

None but ourselves can free our minds”

*Redemption Song* – Bob Marley

A story holds truth. Multiple, varying truths. But what we decide is the truth depends on what story we hear and what story we believe. Varying environmental factors, however, impact what we hear and see, making the truths sometimes hard to decipher. Every story has characters, and every story is told differently. Each perspective offers a unique viewpoint on what happened. One story told in multiple ways may not even sound like the same story. Each perspective offers details maybe unseen from another perspective; thus, creating a whole new story told from the same basic context. Every person reacts to a story differently once these new context details are intertwined with the original story.

Since stories can hold multiple, varying truths for each and every reader, interpreting and debating any single story—any single experience—requires multiple perspectives and multiple interpretations. One person could read a story entirely different from another person based on the experiences and backgrounds they bring into their memoir. During the course of this paper, two memoirs will be analyzed on various spectrums and lenses in order to show how both stories invite multiple and different interpretations. *The Glass Castle* follows the story of Jeannette Walls and her family. Through her own eyes, author Jeannette Walls illustrates her dysfunctional family traveling from place to place, running from poverty and debt collectors, while also showcasing the truth behind what it means to be “at home.” Mostly taking place during the 1960s and 1970s, the Walls’ family journey details the impoverishment they faced during their nomadic lifestyle. Similar to *The Glass Castle*, Tara Westover’s *Educated* illustrates a story of

surviving in tough and often times meager situations. This memoir follows the author's survivalist lifestyle at the hands of her parents. Born in the mountains of Idaho to survivalists, a large portion of her childhood was spent preparing for the end of the world by stockpiling food. Habitually, survivalists ensure their own safety and survival through unconventional methods in preparation for a potential societal anarchy. Lacking a traditional education, Tara began to educate herself. This memoir follows her journey through education from being self-taught to attending college universities. Her journey takes her around the world, but it leaves her with a question: does she even have a home to return to?

Through the course of this thesis, *The Glass Castle* and *Educated* will be put under the microscope by using New Historicism criticism and Psychoanalytic criticism, which are both major components of basic literary criticism. These various lenses will offer new explorations into each memoir's discussion of "home" and poverty in the United States. The primary lenses discussed throughout this conversation will be the historical lens and psychological lens. These lenses' origins, necessity, and impact on information will be discussed in detail during the course of this thesis. These two lenses will shed new light on the memoirs' stories and timelines as well as the characters' inner psyches. These lenses will be expanded into their literary critique functions. Through the course of this thesis, *The Glass Castle* and *Educated* analyzed using New Historicism criticism and Psychoanalytical criticism.

This thesis aims to explore the inner workings of the two different memoirs, not just as pieces of literature but as important parts of telling a historical and psychological story. After reading and interpreting the two memoirs as literary pieces, this thesis aims to expand beyond the text and look at the historical context found within both memoirs as well as looking at

characters' inner psyches. Then, *The Glass Castle* and *Educated* may be compared and contrasted on their discussion of "home" and poverty in the United States.

### **Historical Lens**

A memoir's impact after the initial read consists of consuming the piece as an individual intake. No other influences taken in besides the author's story. This type of consumption of literature follows the basic literary criticism called New Criticism, where a reader only considers the book with no outside information. New Historicism continues to consume the memoir as a piece of literature, but it also takes into consideration the historical, cultural, and political impact surrounding the timeline of the story as well as the memoir itself (Hoover 356). The theory goes that where the New Critics found a self-contained unity in the literary text, the historicists find an expanse of intertextual relations with outside materials.

New Historicism, or historical criticism, involves looking past the text itself and instead finding historical, cultural, and political contexts within the memoir. This could include things such as political environments, poverty levels, geographic culture, and culture surrounding family values among many other things. By examining the historical and cultural influences existing during the two memoirs' time periods, the reader can obtain an in-depth view of the plot of the memoirs as well as expand their consumption and understanding of the content.

First and foremost, the poverty and cultural lifestyle surrounding both memoirs' protagonists will be analyzed using various data sources. By looking at the poverty levels occurring during the duration of both memoirs' timelines, a new perspective on what was possibly driving the protagonists' motivations can be explored. Each memoir details a story of impoverishment told through the eyes of the main characters who happen to also be the authors

of the memoirs. Understanding the poverty levels and poverty culture surrounding the characters' lives can expand the concept of why certain characters made certain choices.

Through the historical lens, a look on the culture surrounding the time period will also be examined. This expands past simply looking at the poverty levels. This will look at the culture surrounding the time period such as family value culture, religious culture, and even looking at the culture surrounding medicine and education. This insight into the cultural makings of a generation and time period allows a reader to further dictate the characters' growth as individuals in unideal conditions.

### **Psychological Lens**

Through a psychological lens, a look into the emotional and mental impact put onto the characters by outside forces can give insight into the characters themselves as well as the story as a whole. Environmental factors are a large part of why both memoirs' protagonists travel from place to place. Some of these environmental factors stem from psychological factors such as mental disorders, family emotional pressures, and even societal pressures. These pressures can enforce psychological trauma or confusion for a person. The psychological lens being discussed in-depth during the course of this thesis will be the idea of mobility within society and the family hierarchy.

By the early 20th century, mobility was seen as indicative of a character flaw, an inability to maintain social relationships in one's community. However, Peter Rossi carried out a groundbreaking study in Philadelphia overturning the common belief that mobile families are "pathological" and instead suggested families move due to changing needs at various points in their lives, which leads to a need for "housing adjustment" (Fitchen 416). Impoverished families

often choose housing based on convenience of the time or the satisfaction of their consumption needs-- all within a strict budget.

Part of mobility is also motility, or the ability to independently move fluidly through space. This construct describes the potential and actual capacity of goods, information, or people to be mobile both geographically and socially. Environmental factors often impact a family's motility (Fitchen 416). The Walls family moves like an independent unit and responds to environmental factors during the course of *The Glass Castle*. Tara Westover uproots everything she knows in order for answers and education in *Educated*. We will see later how this theory of motility plays into the constant movement of the Walls family and the movement of Tara Westover.

Another psychological lens in which the two memoirs will be viewed is through the emotionality and mentality of the characters. The emotion and mentality that lies behind a character can tell the ultimate truth about their journey through the memoir. This lens on the characters' psyches will be not only focus on the main protagonists of the memoirs but on the secondary characters as well. By looking at the psychological lens, this perspective can ultimately enhance the understanding and interpretation of the memoirs.

### **Discovering Poverty While Mapping the Literature**

Both *The Glass Castle* and *Educated* follow stories of impoverished families in the United States. For the purposes of understanding the poverty lifestyle in the United States during the two memoirs' time periods, this study bases its statistics on the U.S. Census data collected from 1963-2003. This allows us to see how poverty has overall grown or decreased throughout our memoirs' timelines. Census statistics date back to 1790 and reflect the growth and change of



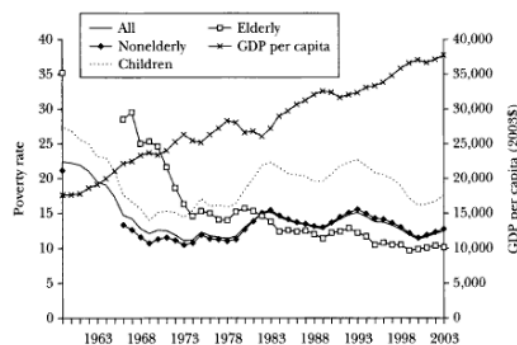
the United States. For this thesis's purpose, we will focus on the statistics of 1960s and 1970s America as well as 1990s and early 2000s.

By mapping the poverty in the United States, our understanding of the forces pushing both memoirs' characters from location to location can be enhanced. Data from the U.S. Census will discover the poverty lifestyle of the United States during key years written in *The Glass Castle* and *Educated*. Reading stories told throughout the memoirs and comparing them to the poverty levels at the time can give us an insight into the culture and climate of the life surrounding the characters. It gives us a deeper insight and understanding of the memoirs in which only outside research could.

Throughout this thesis, key plot points found within the timeline of both Jeannette Walls and Tara Westover's memoirs will be analyzed using literary analysis skills. These plot points will then be analyzed using data found within the U.S. Census Bureau's data collection of that particular year. Finally, the culture of poverty in the location will offer a new illustration of the character's journeys through the United States of America.

Despite a strong growth in real GDP per capita in the last three decades, U.S. poverty rates have changed very little. Some poverty rates of certain demographics remain stagnant while others slowly decrease. According to Figure 1, the poverty rate for children has decreased from 25%-30% in the late 1950s to roughly 15% in the 1960s and 1970s, but it eventually increases to roughly 20% by the end of 2003 (Hoynes 48). This chart done by the Journal of Economic Perspectives

Figure 1  
Trends in Individual Poverty Rates and Real GDP per Capita, 1959–2003



Source: Poverty rates are from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements. The GDP per capita series is from the Economic Report of the President (2005).  
Note: The poverty rate data are unavailable for some subgroups for 1960–1965.

Figure 1

follows the consistently changing poverty rate of the United States. While the GDP per Capita raises the poverty rate slowly, almost stagnant decrease.

Poverty rates measure the individuals currently living under the poverty line. This measurement could be considered inaccurate due to its failure in considering who is actually living in poverty or homeless. During this thesis, the details of Jeannette Walls' family and Tara Westover's journey from location to location, never really stopping to put down official roots. All for better opportunities.

### **Poverty and Homelessness in *The Glass Castle***

The official method of calculating the United States' poverty levels was developed in the 1960s, and it has not been further developed substantially since then. Some critics even say the U.S. government overstates the U.S. poverty level claiming, "it counts as impoverished people who in generations past would be considered as not living in poverty" (Fay 2016). The highest poverty rate on record was 22% in the 1950s. The lowest was 11.1% in 1973.

The United States was so different in 1960, with a poor rural south and southwest, and a fairly poor Great Plains. 1960 was a change in decade, and a new beginning for the nation. The presidential race starring future President John F. Kennedy captivated the nation. With promise of more jobs, a working economy, and a safe nation away from any threat, the nation seemed to be heading towards the right direction. A misguided assumption by the nation. Times were indeed culturally and politically changing, but the nation still suffered. It's biggest suffering came from the poverty-stricken states in the south. States were struggling to avoid debt, provide for their citizens, and create positive economic change. Not to mention, the nation was still reeling from the 1950s and the nation's highest poverty rate on record. A change in decade and

American leadership may have happened, but was this change going to greatly impact the *entire* nation?

While this change in decade and leadership was happening in America, another addition was being made. Jeannette Walls was born in Tucson, Arizona in 1960. Her father and mother, Rex and Rose Mary, dictated Tucson as the birthplace of their second child. During this year, the poverty rate was at an all-time high for not only the state of Arizona but for the entire southwest region. Noted in Figure 2, Arizona's poverty rate was around 24%-30%. This rate skyrocketed past the national poverty rate which was 22.1%. Surrounding Arizona are states with comparable percentages and some quite lower.

After researching and analyzing the poverty culture surrounding the Walls family, it becomes apparent how Jeannette Walls' life begins: in poverty. She was born in a state struggling to regain its economic strength and into a family fighting to survive an economic downturn. Jeannette Walls makes note of this impoverishment when she recounts her first memory in Tucson.

In 1963, roughly around the time when Jeannette caught herself on fire trying to provide food for her siblings, the culture of poverty detrimentally impacted families. Families with an unemployed parent or head of the house accounted for 4.5% of those in poverty, but families with a parent or head of the house employed part time accounted for 23.1% and families without a head in the labor force accounted for 48.9% (Thurow 47). Even if Rex, the memoir author's father, had a job during this time, it can be assumed the Walls family still lived in poverty.

Another clue of poverty was how they avoided paying for Jeanette's hospital bill. One of the many problems in medicine in the 1960s was the lack of insurance for working age and children (Stevens [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)). Insurance lacked coverage for impoverished families,

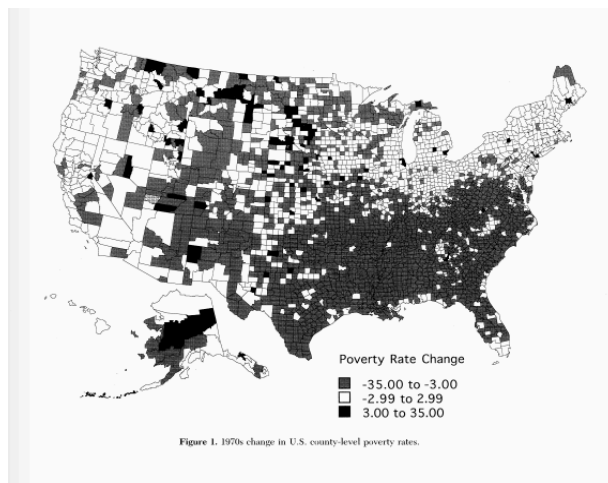
living below the poverty level, which in return impacted the health of children. Rex's sudden departure from the hospital shows this type of trend. With expenses for hospital care at an all-time high and the lack of insurance, Rex avoided paying the bill. Referring back to the idea of motility, the Walls family responded to this environmental factor of their situation. The rising cost of healthcare, lack of insurance, and their impoverished lifestyle caused their reaction of avoiding the hospital bill and uprooting their life in Tucson, AZ.

Jeannette Walls struggles to remember the movement of their family from town to town. Only remembering geographic details of a town, she narrows down the area in which her family lived their nomadic lifestyle. These geographic details are illustrated when Walls writes,

we moved around like nomads. We lived in dusty little mining towns in Nevada, Arizona, and California. They were usually nothing but a tiny cluster of sad, sunken, shacks, a gas station, a dry-goods store, and a bar or two. They had names like Needles and Bouse, Pie, Goffs, and Why, and they were near places like the Superstition Mountains, the dried up Soda Lake, and the Old Woman

Mountain. The more desolate and isolated a place was, the better Mom and Dad liked it. (Walls, 19).

She sees her parents as actively seeking out desolate and isolated places for their family to settle in. She assumed this was at the direction of her father. His dislike of authority figures forced the family to live in places unnoticed by police



Kodras, Janet E. "The Changing Map of American Poverty in an Era of Economic Restructuring and Political Realignment." *Economic Geography*, vol. 73, no. 1, Jan. 1997, pp. 67–93.

Figure 2

officers and other authority figures. The desolation acted as a protection for the family.

This map in Figure 2 shows the United States poverty rates of the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. To the best of her abilities, Jeanette remembers geographical locations of this long travel period. This allows an assumption of her location throughout several years. Traveling throughout southeast California, southern Nevada, and eastern Arizona, the Walls family were traveling in high poverty-stricken areas. These areas had poverty rates ranging from 12%-23.99% with some ranging from 24%-70% in Arizona and Nevada territory (Kodras 75). As a result of these areas having above average poverty rates, the Walls family moved from place to place in hopes of finding better opportunities. The poverty being their environmental factors.

The decade of 1970 began promisingly. In January of 1970, the United States had an unemployment rate of only 3.9 percent. But, this level would be the lowest monthly unemployment rate for the entire 1970s. By the end of the decade, the unemployment rate was 9.0%. This decade experienced what would be the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. The impact of the recession was huge. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2.3 million jobs were lost during this period (DePietro). Income inequality began to rapidly grow during this decade as well. According to the Economic Policy Institute, between 1945 and 1973, the top 1 percent captured only 4.9 percent of total income growth in the country. But after 1973, the top 1 percent saw its total income growth skyrocketed, from 4.9 percent up to 58.7 percent between 1973 and 2007 (DePietro). Thus, the trend during the 1970s was the rich get richer while the poor get poorer.

During the financial chaos of the 1970s, the Walls family uproots their life and settles in a hotel near the chaos known as Las Vegas. Their chaos was defined by their night life reputation

which included bars and casinos and the ever-expanding Las Vegas strip. Rex begins to find his luck in the casinos. He develops a winning method for blackjack and buys everyone vests, cowboy hats, and numerous dinners out. This is the first time Jeannette can recall her father actually spending money on the kids, specifically money on things that weren't food or considered a necessity. Rex's gambling method is finally discovered by casino owners as an illegal method. The family has to perform "the skedaddle," or retreat, and get out of town fast before the debt collectors found their family. They fast-track it through the desert, across California, and finally set up stakes in San Francisco, California.

Rex's stay in Las Vegas was a unique pitstop on the Walls' journey through the southwest United States. This stop provided a blanket of opportunity and a change in lifestyle for the family. Suddenly, they were staying in a decent motel, receiving new clothes from Rex, and eating full meals at restaurants. If only things were that easy for the family. Las Vegas, at the time, was known as a mafia-filled city. The 1960s brought in organized crime from various mobs in the country. Hotels and casinos were bought and ran by big-time mafia groups. Las Vegas was regarded as an "open city" for more than two dozen Mafia families across the country (German). This type of environment plays a key role in why Rex felt the need to uproot his family again and leave without settling a debt. The culture in Las Vegas during the 1960s brought fear to those who didn't pay their debt. This fear becomes an environmental factor forcing the family to leave Las Vegas. It is not a surprise Rex felt the need to leave Las Vegas and head to California.

When they settle in San Francisco, they decide to stay at a hotel in the Tenderloin District. Jeannette and her siblings notice the amount of barely dressed women, sometimes naked, walking throughout the hotel while men continuously follow them around. As an adult, Jeannette realizes her family most likely stayed at a brothel located in the Tenderloin District. A

few nights into their stay at the hotel, Jeannette woke up from her sleep to her father yelling at her and her siblings to get dressed and run outside. There was a fire in the “hotel,” so Rex took the children across the street to a bar, left them there, and ran in to fight the fire. The men in the bar laughed at the naked women running out of the “hotel,” and Jeannette suddenly became aware of her and her siblings in their underwear.

The fire died down, but the Walls were out of a house again. They lived on a beach sleeping in their car for a few days. That was until the police found them and ordered them to move. Rex was infuriated at being told what to do and where to sleep claiming “these cities will kill you” (Walls 34). He decided the family was moving back to the desert. Where exactly he wasn’t sure. He would find it once they got there.

During their time in San Francisco, many environmental factors played into the Walls family's departure. The fire in the brothel caused the family to move, but they didn't move far. Staying in the same city after this incident either shows Rex's stubbornness in uprooting his family again or the lack of resources for them to move. The largest environmental factor forcing the Walls family out of San Francisco is their run in with the police officer. Rex uses this situation as a reason to uproot his family entirely.

The main environmental factor forcing the Walls family’s departure was the homelessness culture existing throughout San Francisco in the 1970s. Historically, San Francisco is known for its homelessness problem. The crisis has been a problem for decades — the result of a combination of massive state and federal cuts to mental health services and public housing, skyrocketing home prices, and a spike in unemployment caused by a national recession (Caldararo 5). San Francisco was hit particularly hard, especially in the Tenderloin and other downtown neighborhoods. Most areas were considerably depressed in the 1970s as many

factories moved to lower rent locations in other parts of the Bay Area (Caldararo 5). With the Walls living in the Tenderloin district, it is no surprise that they lived in a brothel, and with the widespread homelessness in San Francisco, the Walls family sought comfort in their car, a thing not uncommon for San Francisco culture.

As they left San Francisco, they drove through the Mojave Desert. It is hard telling how long they spent driving through the desert. Rex found Midland while they were aimlessly driving through the desert. Rex found a scattering of parched little houses and trailers settling into the sand, and shacks with rusty tin roofs. It was Midland, California. Midland is located in the heart of the desert. Truly remote, the water comes in by train TWICE a day. Rex found this town as good a place as any to settle down. While they were there they rented a house that had been built by a mining company.

Midland, California did not offer much opportunity for the Walls family, but it did offer isolation and cheap living. Cheap living in the form of decrepit and rusty housing. With the United States poverty rate resting at 22.1% (Hoynes 48), Midland fell perfectly into this trend. An old mine town nicknamed the "Ghost Town" offered privacy from past environmental factors that would cause the family to be uprooted again. This time the environmental factor came from within. Rosemary's pregnancy created a need for medicine and consistent water, so Rex uprooted his family for a better opportunity. This time heading for Blythe, California roughly 23 miles south of Midland, California.

In Blythe, Jeannette goes to school for the first time at 5 years old and enters the 1st grade. School wasn't bad for her. She was always asked to read in front of the class, and she always raised her hands to answer questions. Two months after they moved to Blythe, when Rose Mary said she was 12 months pregnant, she finally gave birth. Rose Mary stayed in the



hospital for two days when Rex took the kids to pick up their mother. They arrived at the hospital when Rex went inside and left the car idling. They came out running with Rex's arms around the mother while she carried the new baby.

Two months later, they were pulled over by a cop who said their brake lights were out. Rex sped off claiming the cops could arrest them for not having registration or insurance. They parked the car in a garage and walked home as they heard the sirens wailing in the background. The next day, Rex said Blythe was "getting a little too hot" for him, so they were onto the next adventure to a new town.

With Blythe offering Jeannette and her siblings their first experience in the American school system, shedding light on the history surrounding American education at the time can offer a new perspective on the Walls' experience. During the 1970s, the American education system was at a changing point. After two decades exploding knowledge and the triumphal march of science and technology, the American education system found it harder to be humble in the knowledge that the sky is no longer the limit. With men on the moon, the evolution of the television and radio, and early thoughts of the computer, the American education system was on the precipice of a new way of learning (Hechinger).

Along with the change in culture provided by technology, the American education system changed in another cultural manner: the diversity of the classrooms. During the time they spent in Blythe, mid-1970s, women were achieving higher degrees than before. In 1975, roughly 26.5% of women attained schooling less than a high school equivalency. 45.5% of women attended 4 years of high school while 14.1% of women attained a bachelor's degree. These percentages are slightly higher than the percentages of the early 1970s. Only 11.2% of women attained a bachelor's degree in 1970 while 44.3% attained a high school diploma ("A Look").

Times were changing in the American education system when it came to opportunities for women.

Although women seemed to be slowly gaining opportunities in the education system, there was still a cultural shift occurring since the early 1950s. This shift being the Supreme Court's decision for desegregation in 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Even after decades of desegregation, Americans were still facing difficulties in the 1970s of integrated school systems. In 1971, the Supreme Court's hearing in *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg County Board of Education* discussed the issues facing desegregation after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Prior to the Swann case, school systems in rural areas had transported white students out of their neighborhoods to attend school for decades, while African American students were sometimes denied access to public school transportation (Ramsey). Although this action didn't directly impact the Walls family, it remained the culture impacting the American education system at the time.

This destination was different from the previous ones. It wasn't random. Instead, Rex told them he had done research on a northern Nevada town called Battle Mountain, an old mining town. The Walls family moved into an old depot station that had no furniture. The children slept in refrigerator boxes, and the family used industrial cable spools as tables and chairs. This town held a long memory for Jeannette as it was the longest stay they had in one town. It wasn't until an altercation with police officers concerned with the children's well-being. The police officers arrived at the Walls' door claiming to take the kids away from their parents. They were told to arrive at the courthouse tomorrow morning to further discuss things, but Rex uprooted the family and headed to their next home.

This scare of the police discovering their impoverished lifestyle became the major environmental factor forcing the Walls family out of Battle Mountain. Even though they revitalized a rent-free house and finally owned a home, this environmental factor was great enough to uproot the family. During the 1960s, it was common for children to be taken away from their parents under the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) amendment within the Social Security Act. States received federal funds for foster care children for children who were removed from unsuitable homes. Due to this federal amendment, states became strict on child welfare (Murray 2). Looking at the graph below, the population of the foster care system skyrocketed between 1960 and 1965 with a steady increase through the late 1960s and early 1970s. This would've been the prime time of the Walls family in Battle Mountain. This environmental factor of the police ordering them to the courthouse becomes even more dangerous when statistics of foster care systems and legislature is factored in. This interaction leads the Walls family to their next endeavor, Phoenix, Arizona.

The Walls family heads to Phoenix in a rush. In this instance, they knew they had a house to live in. Jeannette and her family stayed in their grandma's house. The children begin to attend school again while Rex got a job as an electrician and began a sober lifestyle. Although he continuously lost his job, Phoenix was a big enough city that he could easily find jobs. Each of the sub-regions of Arizona contribute to the state's low and declining levels of productivity and prosperity relative to the national average. However, the Phoenix area has the state's highest levels and has declined the least over time (Hoffman 6). Historically, Phoenix has had the highest levels of productivity and prosperity even though it's a larger city. This new insight sheds light on why Rex was able to find work in Phoenix easier than in past towns.

Stubbornness played a big role in the Walls family leaving Phoenix, but a bigger environmental factor forced them as well. Alcoholism. Rosemary's disgust with Rex's drinking leads her to uproot the family and head to Welch, West Virginia. Studies conducted internationally show a clear and persistent increase in alcoholism through the past five decades. Studies go further in saying that people with lower income, education or occupational status are much more likely to die or suffer from a disease related to their alcohol use (Jones and Sumnall 9). Alcohol was woven into Rex's lifestyle, but it wasn't until Phoenix that Rosemary decided it was a big enough factor to uproot her family.

On their way to their next endeavor, Jeannette remembers distinct geographical features of their journey to Welch, West Virginia. Based on her descriptions, the Walls family traveled through New Mexico, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky, and finally West Virginia. They arrive in Welch to Rex's mother's house which is covered in coal mining dust. Rosemary may have forced her family to move in with Rex's parents, but it could have also been due to the economic downturn of the time. The Walls' time in Welch, West Virginia takes place during the entirety of the 1970s. By sharing a house with Rex's family, the Walls were saving money during a time where money couldn't be spared.

The environmental factors impacting the movement from Welch influenced the children before it influenced the parents. Economically, West Virginia lost its major mines in the downturn of the American steel industry. The poverty rate, 50% in 1960, declined — partly as a result of federal benefits — to 36% in 1970 (Gabriel). The American economy began supplying benefits to the American people in order to lower the poverty levels across the nation. Lori and Jeannette moved to New York even though the poverty rate during the late 70s was at roughly 20.2% (Levitan and Wieler).

Lori and Jeannette moved to New York City, specifically the South Bronx, to leave their poverty-stricken parents. Although they uprooted their lives to find opportunities, they found poverty and homelessness unmatched in any other cities. In 1969, 14.5 percent of residents lived below the poverty line which was comparable to the nation's 13.7 percent. By 1979, one in five city residents, or 20.2 percent, lived in poverty in New York (Levitan and Wieler). This poverty trend is shown when they live in the women's hostel and eventually move to a small apartment in the South Bronx.

New York City was an extreme change from their lifestyle with their family, but Lori and Jeanette made adjustments in order to make their own, independent life. As their parents followed them to New York, Jeannette began familiar with the term "squatting." Landlords would increasingly neglect their buildings. Buildings weren't as profitable. There was a degree of disinvestment, house values and rents decreased, and financial institutions stopped supplying mortgage money to the area. When landlords could no longer collect enough house rent to cover the costs, these buildings would be abandoned and often taken over by squatters. Squatting became part of the culture of poverty and a new factor in Lori and Jeanette's life.

### **Psychological Impact of Poverty in *The Glass Castle***

Poverty and homelessness have been a consistent struggle for the United States. When there is an economic depression, poverty and homelessness ravage the streets of the nation. Economic growth tends to the poverty and homelessness problem, but it does not completely eradicate the problem. That would simply be a fever dream. In the Walls family's case, they faced intense poverty throughout their entire lives. Although the children eventually escaped the extreme poverty of their lifestyle and left their parents to squat in an abandoned New York City

building, the four children still faced the repercussions of living an impoverished lifestyle like they did growing up.

The impact poverty has on an individual influences their physical and psychological health. Physical consequences range from scars, birth defects, and various other physical injuries easily retained while living in poverty. It becomes trickier when it comes to determining the psychological impacts caused by poverty and homelessness. Assumptions of possible psychological effects derived from poverty can be made broadly, but the accuracy would be difficult to pin down. The safest assumption we can make is poverty holds a seemingly unbreakable grip on families, neighborhoods, cities, and entire countries.

When it comes to family, poverty often stretches from one generation to the next. It traps individuals in a socioeconomic pit that makes it nearly impossible to climb out of. If and when they attempt the climb, the ascension is extensive, challenging, and sometimes traumatizing. Some are able to make it out while others are not. Both are scathed. Poverty remains an unending cycle that tries to stop anyone from leaving. Part of the fire for poverty's unending cycle is its suppressing effects on individuals' cognitive development, executive functioning, and attention (Sleek). Four scientists demonstrated the cognitive impacts derived from poverty during an inaugural International Convention of Psychological Science in 2015. In an Integrative Science Symposium on cognition, behavior, and development in socioeconomic contexts, the scientists shared findings on the psychological impact of living with scarce resources and a low socioeconomic status (SES) versus abundance and security (Sleek). Their symposium focused on finding a better grasp on how poverty impacts brain development and individual's life chances—ultimately leading to a knowledge of which intervention tolls might be effective in curving poverty's impact.

Through decades of research, it has been documented that people who deal with stressors such as low family income, discrimination, limited access to health care, exposure to crime, and other conditions of low SES are highly susceptible to physical and mental disorders, low educational attainment, and low IQ scores (Sleek). Through a study at the University of Pennsylvania, Martha Farah notes how some cognitive functions are more affected than others. She has found that memory is particularly vulnerable to children living in low SES settings. The specific factor impacting memory is the child's parents' ability to respond and support under stressful situations of poverty (Sleek). This data follows predictions made through a decade's time of research and questionnaires.

Farah furthered her studies by examining a group of children for more than 20 years. Between the ages of 4 and 8, research assistants made at-home visits to study cognitive behavior surrounding their upbringings. They found that large amounts of cognitive stimulation at early ages enhanced the children's language development. The study goes further and states that poverty in the earliest years of childhood may be more harmful than poverty later in childhood (Sleek). The questionnaires and studies have proven the assumption that poverty negatively impacts an individual both physically and psychologically. They further prove children are at more risk for these impacts than older adults. Their psyche being the most at risk.

APS Fellow Eldar Shafir of Princeton University takes a slightly different perspective on poverty by looking at its impact on behavior and decision-making. This study focuses on how individuals in poverty make perceptive decisions than assumptions believe. He found often times they weigh tradeoffs, pay special attention to prices, and juggle resources carefully. Although they wisely focus on these issues, their intense focus on stretching their scarce resources can absorb all their mental capacity. This leaves them with little or no "cognitive bandwidth" to

pursue job training, education, and other opportunities that could help them with the climb out of poverty (Sleek). This study by Shafir emphasizes the impact of the unending cycle poverty has on an individual and even their family. Although they may try to make the climb out of the pit of poverty, that climb may take a lifetime to achieve. Poverty becomes an easy transference from generation to generation.

*The Glass Castle* illustrates this struggle of climbing out of poverty through the children's slow disassociation with their father, Rex, nearing the end of his life. Jeanette recognizes certain events in her life where the normalcy was missing. Throughout her childhood, Jeanette traveled across the country from one town to another, running away from environmental factors forcing them out of each town. These environmental factors preyed on the family's poverty struggle. Each environmental factor had extreme effects on the children's psychological health.

The first time we see an intense event impact the Jeannette's psychological health is through the first memory Jeannette and in which the book opens. Jeannette's first memory of herself, 3-years-old, attempting to make hot dogs for her mother and siblings. Jeannette dramatically opens her memoir by saying "I was on fire" (Walls 9). From the time it took her to lean over and feed the dog, her bright pink tutu had caught fire, and the fire began quickly climbing the length of her body. First, her torso and eventually her neck. Jeannette became familiar with Tucson, Arizona because she suffered many hospital nights alone during her six-week stay. The significant trauma Jeannette faced during this encounter with fire unknowingly damaged her psychologically.

This psychological trauma caused by the fire is the first instigator in a chain reaction of Jeannette's mental and emotional damage. When the Walls family leaves a miscellaneous town



and heads to their next endeavor, a seemingly minuscule event occurs. As they begin their trek to another town, the “Green Caboose,” their green station wagon, hits a railroad track in the desert, and Jeannette finds herself knocked out the car and onto the desert floor. She sees her parents speed off down the Nevadan dirt road, not looking back. She waits for her parents to realize her absence, but she begins to realize they may not return for her. She thinks, “they might decide that it wasn’t worth the drive back to retrieve me; that, like the Quixote the cat, I was a bother and a burden they could do without” (Walls 30). Emotionally, Jeannette assumed her presence a burden, possibly due to the apparent financial struggles of her family. With her extreme third-degree burns and the apparent financial struggle of the Walls family, Jeannette assumes her family would abandon her with no ill feelings. This excerpt of the story illustrates how the physical and emotional impacts of poverty influences a child.

Jeannette illustrates another instance in which her psyche is compromised by her impoverished surroundings and lack of parent involvement. They eventually find themselves living in a brothel in the Tenderloin District in San Francisco, California. During their time at the brothel, Jeannette plays a lot with fire in the bathroom. She experiments with the power of fire and studies its weakness. Jeannette does things like putting piles of toilet paper in the toilet, setting them on firing, and flushing them down. She claims she tortured the fire, gave it life, then snuffed it out. It would be a slippery slope to assume Jeannette’s psychological stress instigated her playing with fire when she was nearly nine years old. However, it can be presumed it may have been a factor.

Later on in her childhood, they settled in Battle Mountain for one of their longest stays in the Western United States. Battle Mountain was the town that held the most memory from Jeannette’s childhood. Her father had off and on jobs while they stayed in Battle Mountain.

Nevertheless, she recalls one memory standing out from all the others. She made friends with a neighborhood boy, but the boy, Billy, quickly began wanting to call her his girlfriend. After school one day, she was playing hide and seek with the neighborhood boys when Billy pushed her into a small space and assaulted her, nearly raping her. The other neighborhood kids heard her, but they didn't believe her. She only told Brian and Lori about what happened, and later that next day, Lori, Brian, and Jeannette found Billy in the neighborhood and shot him with BB guns, and then threatened to turn their dad loose on him. They never talked to Billy after that until the cops showed up at their doors claiming to take the kids away from their parents as a result of the BB shooting. They were told to arrive at the courthouse the next morning to further discuss things, but Rex uprooted the family, "Rex Walls-style" meaning without premonition, and headed to their next home.

This interaction in Battle Mountain drastically impacts Jeannette's psychological health as it would anyone else. As Jeannette played with the neighborhood children, she was sexually assaulted by a child not much older than her. A child's psychological health is proven to be impacted when parents are not responsive nor supportive. In Jeannette's case, her parents' solution was to abandon their life in Battle Mountain and find a new place to leave. This response, though, makes sense when looking at the bigger picture. Jeannette's parents could not have spoken for Jeannette in a courtroom because they would then have to explain their socioeconomic standing—which was riddled in poverty. Jeannette seemingly had to deal with her emotions after this encounter on her own.

Within their journey through the Mojave Desert, the Walls family lived within the desert while their mother painted the illustrious Joshua Tree. It stood in a crease of land where the desert ended and the mountain began, forming the perfect wind tunnel. The Walls family stayed

in this spot until her mother could finish her painting. When Jeannette recalls this section, she writes:

from the time the Joshua tree was a tiny sapling, it had been so beaten down by the whipping wind that, rather than trying to grow skyward, it had grown in the direction that the wind pushed it. It existed now in a permanent state of windblownness, leaning over so far that it seemed ready to topple, although, in fact, its roots held it firmly in place.

(Walls, 35)

There seems to be a metaphor in place when Jeannette writes this section. Later on while exploring the Mojave Desert, Jeannette's mother catches her watering a Joshua Tree seed and stops her saying to Jeannette, "you'd be destroying what makes it special. It's the Joshua tree's struggle that gives it its beauty" (Walls 38). The character development of Jeannette has similarities with the Joshua Tree. Through years and years of physical and psychological damage at the hands of poverty in America, Jeannette seems ready to topple, but since her roots and determination are firmly in place, she simply becomes shaped and "windblown." The result of her psychological damages being her growth in strength during atrocious situations—making her like a Joshua Tree's journey.

Jeannette and her siblings retained the brunt of the physical and psychological impacts thrown at them due to their poverty, but they were not the only ones who had suffered psychologically due to their socioeconomic standing—Rex was the example of an impoverished lifestyle impacting an individual psychologically through and into their adult years. A glimpse of Rex's childhood is seen when the family stays in Welch, West Virginia with his family. The Walls family does not stay at Rex's parent's house for too long. It is apparent his relationship with his mother is unsteady. We see his mother's true colors during an interaction with

Jeannette's brother, Brian. One evening, Rex's mother reprimands Brian for "mouthing off" to her, and while reprimanding him, she grabs him in an inappropriate manner. Brian screams for help, and he immediately tells his parents of his grandmother molesting him. Infuriating and denying the occurrence, the grandmother kicked the family out of her house. This further sheds light on the environment Rex grew up in. Rex was intimidated by his mother so much so he wouldn't speak up for his son's accusations against her. This fear and intimidation instilled in Rex may have occurred when he was a child living with his parents in poverty in Welch, West Virginia.

This intimidation and fear instilled in him could be the cause of psychological problems occurring well into his adulthood. Whether his childhood mirrored Brian's incident will never be known. His childhood woes can be assumed when the attention is turned towards the environmental factors forcing them out of Phoenix, Arizona. Stubbornness played a big role in the Walls family leaving Phoenix, but a bigger environmental factor forced them as well. Alcoholism. Rex's drinking leads Rose Mary to uproot the family and head to Welch, West Virginia in hopes that Rex's parents will be able to control his drinking habits.

Studies conducted internationally show a clear and persistent increase in alcoholism through the past five decades. Studies go further in saying that people with lower income, education, or occupational status are much more likely to die or suffer from alcoholism (Jones and Sumnall). Throughout *The Glass Castle*, Jeannette gives short glimpses of Rex's drinking habits. Whether it is stopping at a bar in Nevada to drink while the kids stay in the car or leaving for work and coming back drunk, Jeannette clearly illustrates her father's strong drinking habits. At the time, alcoholism was not deemed a problem caused by psychological woes. Its irredeemable miseries seen as just a relief from the daily grind of work and family. However,

with Rex's case, it could be seen as a result of past psychological damage stemming from his childhood.

The Walls family's endeavors through poverty has clearly had its psychological impact on the family—big or small. They have faced adversities when it comes to poverty; that is obvious. When it comes to the psychological impact on the children and Rex, we look through their time in each town and more specifically on Jeannette's memories and thoughts regarding their time as a family. Jeannette gives a peek into her thinking as a child whether it was abandonment by her family or her notice of her father's drinking habits. Poverty clearly has its physical impact on the family, but it digs its way into their psychological health as well.

### **Warped Reality in *Educated***

Nearly two decades after Jeannette Walls' timeline in her memoir, Tara Westover begins her story in the 1990s and ends it in the early 2000s. The 1990s and early 2000s was a transformative decade spreading new ideas and unthinkable innovations. The 1990s brought the World Wide Web along with faster computers and infinite accessibility by cell phone and email. The world was changing and with the technology of the 1990s it was changing faster than the people could get ahold of. This new quick paced world brought in new societal structures in the United States as well.

The 1990s was a new generation where controversial issues were streamlined on television eventually becoming topics of discussion in everyday life. Some issues ranged from racial issues brought on by the O.J. Simpson trial and acquittal as well as shaping the "norms" surrounding modern relationships by the hit shows *Seinfeld* and *Friends* who both focused on young single adults. The 1990s and early 2000s brought in a whole new generation of ideas and "norms" whether it came to fashion, music, politics, or reality television.

This new decade screamed new, transformative ideas across the nation, but for a person like Tara Westover, this decade blended in with the years before her. Living as a survivalist means Tara and her family never say the “outside world”, as they called it, so their lives stayed stagnant during such a transformative era. These monumental changes were happening with no true impact on the Westover family. Adopting a self-sufficient, survivalist lifestyle, Tara Westover’s father, Gene, put all seven of his children to work at a young age in his scrap yard and hoarded supplies for the “Days of Abomination,” which he always believed was just around the corner. He believed the “Days of Abomination” or “End of Days” would bring salvation to the Earth where only the true believers would survive and prosper. As a result of Gene’s isolating his family and denying them medical assistance in emergencies or education in anything other than the Bible and the ways of life on the harsh mountain, the Westover family missed monumental moments in past and ongoing history. Once Tara grew older and sought public education, she quickly realized the warped reality she was living in.

Throughout her childhood, Tara remembers key moments where her father would mention events impacting their way of life, but she never was given the entire story let alone a story with all the factual details. Tara gives glimpses of her warped reality when she finally educates herself on the events her father had mentioned to her as a child. One of these events being the Ruby Ridge siege in 1992.

This historic event made headlines for weeks after it occurred and even declared a Federal investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 1995. Media across the nation froze and turned to northern Idaho and focused on a location called Ruby Ridge. The Federal Government arrived at Ruby Ridge to scout a location where they might ambush a fugitive, Randy Weaver. Weaver had been isolated for a year and half with his family in his

cabin. The U.S. Marshals were apprehending Weaver based on his having failed to attend his trial on firearms charges (Wilson). A firefight erupted between six U.S. Marshals and two young boys. The siege spanned 11 days with news coverage and even attracted far-right groups protesting what they saw as a tyrannical government imposing on an innocent family.

Ruby Ridge resolved after an 11-day standoff between Randy Weaver, his son, and his son's friend. During the first two days, Randy Weaver's son, wife, and a U.S. Marshal were killed in fire. The remaining nine days included shoot offs, casualty wounds, and an eventual negotiation led by civilian negotiators which included a former conspiracy theorist and a former Populist party's presidential candidate (Wilson). After the chaos of Ruby Ridge, the far right emerged rhetoric that the federal government were coming for the guns and property of those, like the Weavers, who wanted no further contact with a country they saw as irredeemably corrupt (Wilson). This type of rhetoric kick started a movement once thought dead in the United States. Following this chaos, the Federal government inherited a mess of cover-ups and explanations resulting from the Ruby Ridge incident.

Nearly five years after the incident in 1997, an FBI supervisor was sentenced to 18 months in prison for burying documents detailing the agency's approach to the siege ahead of Weaver's trial. Mike German, a former FBI officer, says while the FBI "inherited a mess" when it took on the badly handled case, the bureau "ultimately saw it as a mistake, and an escalation that had caused significant harm, including children" (Wilson). The FBI eventually answered for their mishandling of the Ruby Ridge cases as well as several others before Congress and admitted that law enforcement "did not perform at the level which American people expect or deserve from the FBI". (Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Government

Information). This mishandling and intended cover-up of the Ruby Ridge incident set fire to a revolution of far-right and survivalists claiming the government was against the people.

We catch a glimpse of Tara's understanding of this event. Her father gives her only the slight details of the Ruby Ridge incident as it pertains to him and his family. Gene often told stories from his perspective which influenced the way his family understood the stories. In respect to the Ruby Ridge incident, Gene told his family the story as if no one in the world knew about it except them. The facts told to Tara were factual but twisted to benefit Gene's influence on the family. The dramatics of the incident was embellished to strike reality into Tara, her siblings, and their mother. Without ever being told the result of the Ruby Ridge incident, the family was kept in the dark as to what actually happened in northern Idaho that week and a half. Tara remembers her father saying, "next time, it could be us" (Westover 11). This rhetoric further instilling the fear of the United States government into the Westover family. A fear that would last years.

Not long after the Ruby Ridge incident in 1992, the beginning of a new decade held even more paranoia for the future whether you were a survivalist or not. Y2K released a paranoia into the United States at the end of the 1990s. As 1999 approached, the world became enthralled with the coming of the year 2000, shortly nicknamed Y2K. Superstition began to rise surround the turning of year numbers to 2000, but many focused on a predicted technological problem known as the Y2K Glitch. This glitch was feared to cause computers and computer-assisted devices to malfunction at the turn of the century. The built-in processors illustrating the date and time on electronic devices are called embedded systems (Holmes). Those that are date-dependent were not expected to function properly or even possibly shut down as 1999 rolled over to 2000. Seemingly assuming that computers were not equipped to process dates past December 31,



1999—including those computers controlling bank transactions, transportation networks, and government data. Among the darkest predictions were worries that air traffic control systems would fail, major utility companies would be unable to supply water and electrical power, and banks wouldn't acknowledge mortgage payments or social security checks.

With paranoia growing day by day about the possibility of Y2K destruction on society, the Year 2000 Readiness and Disclosure Act made businesses liable if they provided consumers with inaccurate information regarding their Y2K readiness. Businesses typically did not provide free upgrades to make computers and other devices compliant with Y2K, but they did have information on their websites regarding corrections that could be downloaded (Holmes). This was done in an effort to prepare and protect Americans who may be impacted by Y2K.

As the year 2000 became a reality, most of the major computer systems were Y2K compliant. There were no widespread failures, and industries across the nation functioned normally. Y2K seemed to be a complete bust. Analysis after Y2K predicts the total estimated costs in preparation for the United States was roughly \$300 billion (Holmes). While some say the United States was prepared for the date and, therefore, that was why the nation didn't face any failures, critics said other countries did not prepare for Y2K to the extent that the United States did, and they also did not have major problems with Y2K in 2000. As to whether the United States aptly prepared or over prepared, perhaps that will never be known. The paranoia, however, will live in history books forever.

Y2K instilled paranoia in the most secure banks and most protected computer software across the nation. When Tara finally gets whiff of Y2K, the paranoia reaches its peak in her family. Gene notifies the family of the upcoming Y2K which would sink the world into chaos thus bringing the "Second Coming of Christ" (Westover 84). After explaining how government-

made computers will crash when the new year is rung in, Tara asks her father why the government can't fix their own computers. Gene responds simply by saying, "man trusted his own strength, and his strength was weak" (Westover 84). This rhetoric cements the stigma of the government's distrust and idiocy, and therefore, convinces the Westover family to not only be wariness of the government but to isolate themselves from it.

Fearing the epidemic Y2K would cause, Gene recruited the family to prepare for the "End" as he also called it. Every day, the Westover family would boil and skin peaches, pit apricots, and churn apples into sauce. Everything was eventually pressure cooked, sealed, labeled, and stored away in a root cellar built by Gene. Along with this root cellar, Gene excavated a hole in the ground big enough to fit a thousand-gallon tank (Westover 85). Gene instilled the fear of the ending times approaching the United States. So much so, the Westover family had an entire plan for the "Second Coming of Christ." A plan they never got to accomplish.

Y2K, however, was not the only incident where the Westover family felt it necessary to prepare for the end of the world. In 2001, when the Twin Towers fell, the Westover family experienced a fear alongside every other American in the nation. Although she knew about the tragedy of 9/11, Tara did not fully know the severity or aftermath of the attack. The only information she received about the attack, besides watching it initially on television, was from her father, Gene. She was told there would be a final struggle for the Holy Land and that eventually his sons will be sent to war (Westover 112). For weeks, Tara awaited the government coming to Buck's Peak, their acreage, and taking her brothers to war. Forgetting all the past woes facing her family and herself, Tara forgave everyone since it was the "End of the World."

The tragedy of 9/11 struck Tara, but it wasn't until she educated herself at college that she truly began to understand the details and aftermath of the attack. Attending Brigham Young University brought her various awakenings as to the historic and cultural incidents of the United States. One of her most memorable awakenings while attending college occurred in her Western Art class. Her professor lays a picture onto the projector screen, and her classmates have an emotional reaction to the image. A man in faded hat with a looming concrete wall behind him as he holds a paper and sullenly looks in the camera staring the classroom back. Tara doesn't recognize the title of the piece. When the professor asks Tara to read aloud the title of the image, she pauses at an italicized word asking for assistance. The professor, offended and shocked, tells Tara "enough" (Westover 157).

Confused and embarrassed, Tara rushes to the school library to search the meaning of the italicized word underneath the painting. She types in the word Holocaust and finally understands the silence she received in the classroom. After reading the horrifying truth behind the Holocaust, she loses track of time and decides she's had enough research. Embarrassed, she remembers her mother teaching her something about five Jewish people being killed a long time ago (Westover 158). She quickly realizes five people is monumentally different than six million. Looking back at the lessons her parents taught her, she begins to acknowledge there may be factual inaccuracies as to what she believes to be true.

These factual inaccuracies are attributed to how her father explains historic and cultural events along with how he illustrates what is "right" and "wrong." Most of Tara's remembrance of historic events were told by her father and, therefore, had religious undertones taken from his interpretation of the Mormon faith. This faith embraces the concept of Christianity along with revelations made by the founder, Joseph Smith. Followers of Mormonism claim that God has

sent more prophets after Jesus's death in the Christian bible (Lyon 622). The number of prophets is unknown, but they believe God sent an abundance of prophets to help spread their faith.

Through the years, survivalists have often used religion when they endeavor into a survivalist lifestyle. There are a number of spiritual reasons why stepping outside the boundaries of human society would seem attractive. Christian history has been filled with individuals who withdraw to solitary places for prayer and separate themselves from the influences of culture ("A Biblical View"). There has been a number of well-known non-conformists who have isolated themselves and pursued a solitary lifestyle away from influences of society. The Weaver family of Ruby Ridge is an example of this. Some of these people belong to sects who are convinced they are living in the "end times." This fear stems from people seeking refuge from famine or natural disasters, but it also stems from individuals seeking to distance themselves from society's culture simply because they distrust the government.

Throughout *Educated*, this display of fear and paranoia surrounding the government is illustrated through Gene's beliefs and interactions with his family. Tara's understanding of certain historic and cultural events are often times misinformed by her father. Although she does remember certain events occurring such as Ruby Ridge or 9/11, she has no recollection of other historic events like the Holocaust. In this case, her misinformation on the Holocaust led her to believe only 5 Jewish people died when, in reality, it was roughly six million people. Her misinformation caused her to feel completely lost in class and in society.

Tara realized the warped reality she was living in while at Buck's Peak with her family. The information she received from the "outside" world was either misinformed, diminished in magnitude, or simply not told to her. Once she educated herself on societal and cultural events that have happened throughout history, she began to understand problems existing within her

father's explanation of events. She realized what was considered wrong within society that wasn't necessarily considered wrong in her household at Buck's Peak. Racist and sexist words and phrases accepted in her household were suddenly not accepted in normal society. Tara remembers her father's books telling her about slavery. She had read that, "slaves in colonial times were happier and more free than their masters, because the masters were burdened with the cost of their care" (Westover 178). To Tara, this had made sense to her. The racist, derogative terms they used on their scrapyard didn't seem offensive. However, when she entered a college campus, her eyes were opened to the historical and cultural inconsistencies in which her father's book taught her.

Tara looks back on the misconstruing of information given to her by her father. She wonders how much her life was shaped by his teachings and whether she can break away from the person he made her. With her broadened future ahead of her and the acceptance she doesn't know everything to be certain, she undertakes the mighty task of furthering her education and getting her Master's degree. Far outstretching her father's educational understanding.

### ***Educated Psychological Lens***

During her memoir, Tara discusses the epiphany she had when realizing her father's possible mental illness. Attending college truly opened her eyes to the possibility that her father could be suffering from something much more serious than delusion—bipolar disorder. Tara explained her father's symptoms to various neuroscientists and psychologists, quickly learning that every mental illness case is different. After describing his symptoms to various neuroscientists and psychologists, Tara was told her father could be suffering from schizophrenia, but that she would never truly know unless he went to a doctor. Tara knew that was out of the question. After questioning and research, Tara diagnosed her father with bipolar

disorder, and she began to write a paper focusing on the effect bipolar parents have on their children.

Tara writes why children are hit with double risk factors when it comes to bipolar parents: first, because they are genetically predisposed to mood disorders, and second, because of the “stressful environment and poor parenting of parents with such disorders” (Westover 211). Tara was taught about the neurotransmitters and their effect on the brain chemistry which caused illnesses like bipolar disorder. She realized disease is not a choice, and she hoped this would make her more sympathetic towards her father, but it did the opposite. Although Gene possibly suffered from bipolar disorder, Tara believes the family was the ones who paid for it. His mental illness forcing the family to live in a constant state of fear and paranoia; their brains constantly flooding with cortisol because they knew any of his hysterics could happen at any moment.

Through her college courses, Tara began exploring possible avenues of how her father’s illness may have compromised her self-growth. Her most memorable theory relies on Isaiah Berlin’s Concepts of positive and negative liberty. Tara’s eyes opened wide at the revelation Isaiah Berlin’s Concepts brought her. Berlin focuses on two concepts when it comes liberty and freedom. Her psychology professor explains negative liberty as “the freedom from external obstacles or constraints. An individual is free in this sense if they are not physically prevented from taking action” (Westover 256). This reminds Tara of her eldest brother, Richard. Once he was of age, Richard left home to attain an education, married his wife, and continued to follow the Mormon faith. Together, they live a mainstream life and abstain from the constricting and isolating traditions the Westovers had long clung to. Although Richard stayed close to his faith, he had never let it stifle his life or mental health.

Along with negative liberty, positive liberty addresses a similar structure of thinking. Tara's professor explained positive liberty as "the self-mastery—the rule of the self, by the self. To have positive liberty", he explained "is to take control of one's own mind; to be liberated from irrational fears and beliefs, from addictions, superstitions and all other forms of self-coercion" (Westover 256). Tara doesn't entirely understand this definition at the time because she doesn't know what self-coerce means—a person who has self-coerced herself into trying to understand her family's thinking and rationale. Tara doesn't see this irony. Berlin extends the definition of the two concepts of liberties by explaining how they differentiate from each other. Berlin's reason for using these labels—negative and positive—is that the first case of liberty seems to be an absence of something (i.e. obstacles, barriers, or constraints), whereas the second case requires a presence of something (i.e. of control, self-mastery, self-determination, or self-realization). Each of these requiring a complete character shift (Carter).

The idea of distinguishing between positive and negative sense of liberty traces back to Immanuel Kant and eventually finds itself in Isaiah Berlin's work in the 1950s and '60s. Often times the discussions of positive and negative liberty focus around political and social philosophy, but they sometimes relate to discussion about free will. In this case, positive and negative liberty can be directly applied to Tara's life illustrated through her memoir. Looking at her actions while staying at Buck's Peak and comparing them to her slowly developing actions occurring while she's in college show the clear distinction of positive and negative liberties present in her life.

While she was at Buck's Peak, Tara did not have clear distinctions of negative or positive liberties present in her life. Her livelihood focused on pleasing her family and working at the scrapyard with her father and brothers. She consistently defended her father's paranoias about

the federal government as well as made excuses for Shawn as he constantly physically abused her. Her obstacles during that time in her life were mostly physical, yet she did have psychological obstacles she put on herself by mentally rationalizing the good in her bad situation. At this point in time, she seemed to be digging a hole for herself, and with each passing day, the climb grew longer and tougher. Tara's first act of exercising her negative and positive liberties were by leaving Buck's Peak and attaining an education at college.

By leaving Buck's Peak and attending college, Tara ridded herself of the physical obstacles preventing her from self-growth. Her familial traditions would have prevented her from making the discoveries and realizations she made while attending college. With the physical obstacles seemingly gone, Tara had yet gained her positive liberties. She didn't have her sense of control or self-mastery over herself. After learning about Berlin's two concepts, Tara's first glimpse of self-realization occurs while studying abroad in Rome, Italy. While touring the historic treasures of Rome and taking in all of its past, Tara remembers thinking, "I could admire the past without being silenced by it" (Westover 269). This realization opens the door to more self-discoveries of herself and her past at Buck's Peak. She begins to question every incident in her life.

The first incident she recalls from her past is the rocky relationship she has with Shawn, her brother. She begins to realize the cruelty she faced at the hands of her brother. From breaking her fingers, punching the wind out of her, or even choking her until she passed out, Shawn's cruelty occurred throughout her childhood, yet Tara continuously found excuses for his anger. She assumed it was her fault his anger got the best of him. Their relationship ensued this trauma on Tara's behalf. Each encounter followed with an apology from Shawn, and Tara's fear wiped clean. Once Tara realizes the cruelty she faced from Shawn, she realizes she may not have been



the only one. Receiving her sister Audrey's message about her fear for Shawn's new wife due to her suffering caused by Shawn. Tara intends to help Shawn by telling the family to get him help. Although they do not listen and Audrey eventually betrays Tara, this process of self-realization gives her a sense of control over her past—thus, attaining a positive liberty. Tara learns about Berlin's two concepts, positive and negative liberties, and it becomes a central theme in Tara's life. Broadening her education of psychology, her eyes open wide enough to allow self-growth.

While remembering her past memories of her family, Tara has clearly tried to distance herself from her more painful memories over the years—resulting in forgetting memories altogether. In the writing of her memoir, she delves deeper and deeper into her past. Tara is forced to confront the conflicting versions her family members have of events common to all of them. She begins to realize her version of events may not be the correct one.

Tara's journeys into her old childhood memories with writing this memoir are igniting new—possibly forgotten or suppressed—images and details. She tries her best to get a clear picture of the influential and traumatic events which comprised her childhood. She quickly realizes she may need to accept that memory is skewed, imperfect, and often is different for everyone. Even if people were present for the same events, the stories may all end up with differing interpretations.

An example of this is illustrated through Luke's memory of his traumatic fire incident. While Luke was working at the scrapyard filling up tanks of gasoline, a spark engulfed Luke's lower torso in flames. Tara remembers Luke arriving at the house screaming for help. Not knowing what to do, Tara grabs a trash can, washes it out with water, and decides to put Luke's leg in it to engulf the flames. The aftermath found Luke's leg with severe third-degree burns and permanent scars. In Luke's memory of the incident, their father, Gene, takes the place of Tara as

the hero of the story. Maybe the situation was so traumatic for young Tara, she put herself into the story as the hero. It's also conceivable that Luke, fearful and in awe of their father, believed that no one but his father could have saved him. Throughout *Educated*, Tara's family is locked in a cyclical, ill-fated pattern due to their refusal to change, adjust, or confront the dangers of their collective delusions.

### **Synthesis of Two Memoirs**

These two memoirs follow two women from childhood to their full growth into adulthood. A glimpse into their lives allows an illustration of their self-growth as individuals while also seeing them confront their troubled pasts. Viewing the memoirs through the perspectives of Jeannette Walls and Tara Westover allows an intimate outlook in which to view their livelihoods. This outlook allows a look into what has shaped them. Whether it was loving or merciless, their outlooks provided the readers with an insight into their memories and interpretations. Their outlook signifies the possible closure the memoirists may have gotten while writing their stories and reliving their experiences. With this closure, readers can feel an emotional connection to Jeannette and Tara's peace with their past.

Following the stories of Jeannette Walls and Tara Westover through their own eyes, certain implications of the climate of poverty can be made when looking at their experiences. By studying memoirs instead of fictional novels, it allows a reader to see the truth behind the stories of poverty. It shows a true glimpse into poverty through the eyes of two women who faced the ups and downs of living in poverty. This glimpse is extended from their childhood all the way to adulthood, giving us an insight into the ever-changing culture of poverty. Whereas, looking at poverty through fictional novels gives us a glimpse of poverty through the interpretation of what it may have been like for an individual. We don't get a personal interpretation or remembrance

of impoverishment. Instead, we get an analysis without the personal touch of a memoir. Whether the author of a novel actually experienced it is unknown in some cases. In our case, it is certain Jeannette Walls and Tara Westover experienced poverty during their lifetime. Poverty remains a personal story for them.

Through their own eyes, we see the self-growth both Jeannette and Tara made through the course of their memoirs. From growing up in unconventional situations to separating themselves from their familial traditions, Jeannette and Tara tell their first-hand experiences of their struggle through poverty. It gives us their perspective while they climbed out of the hole called poverty.

Peeking into their lives through their memoirs allows readers to enter the mindset of the main characters. It connects the readers to something beyond themselves by inviting us to step into a life and an experience that is not our own. Even if a reader has experienced something similar in their lives, it still does not make that particular experience our own; it instead allows us to relate to a person. Memoirs expose a reader to a broader and different perspective while illustrating a level of intimacy of telling their personal story. This intimacy being the most personal aspect a writer can provide for their readers—a look into their inner minds and soul.

Jeannette and Tara share their inner thoughts and souls with their readers by illustrating their unconventional childhoods at the hands of their families. Each woman details their life in poverty. Growing up without conventionality in the home along with the traumatic experiences they faced as children, it would be unsurprising if Jeannette and Tara held harsh grudges on certain people within their family. However, both Jeannette and Tara do quite the opposite. Their perspectives of living in poverty and unconventionality remains unique to their life, and although they face trauma unlike any other, they maintained a loving and nostalgic memory of their past.

Jeannette details the struggle of connecting with her father after moving to New York City and making a life for herself. There was a sense of shame and possibly guilt of her past life with her family and the relationship she holds with them now. So much so, when she sees them for the first time in the city as she's driving by in a taxi, she sinks down into her seat in hopes of anonymity. Unfortunately, she doesn't achieve her goal. Feeling pressured to visit her parents in the city, she visits the building in which they are squatting and brings along her siblings as well. Although her father's dislike for her chosen lifestyle becomes increasingly apparent during their time spent together, Jeannette makes it an effort to see her father before his death. Her meeting with her father indicates a new peace forming between the two. Her last moments with her father was spent discussing the Glass Castle they were going to build, and Jeannette reminds her father how fun planning their castle was to her. This last moment with her father lets Jeannette recognize the compassion she has for her father and mother and is forced to examine her own life. She was forced to recognize what she loved in her father and thus what she loved in herself—her independence and wild hopes.

Along with Jeannette, Tara finds closure and solace while writing this memoir about her time as a child and the unconventional interactions with her family. This closure allows her to understand her father's role in shaping Tara into the woman she is today. Tara states, "I am not the child my father raised, but he is the father who raised her" (Westover 328). Her statement recognizes the immense role her father had in shaping Tara into the woman she is today. Her father's personality was unconventional, but it shaped her into the independent woman she is today. Without her father's unconventionality and mental illness, she may not have felt the need to pursue an education, let alone pursue a PhD. She would have never traveled abroad to Europe and explored their history. She wouldn't even know much of the United States' history if she

hadn't felt trapped by the family her father built and left to get an education. Although her father's beliefs and unconventionality traumatized Tara through her childhood and adult life, it still molded her into the person she is today—an independent, free-thinking, best-selling author.

Both Tara and Jeannette struggled to accept their fathers as they were growing up in unconventional households. They focus on how their fathers' neglect and possible mental illness framed the rest of their lives. Although this framing offered difficult times and create holes in which it took them years to climb out of, both memoirists discuss how their lives were shaped by their fathers—for better or worse. Out of unideal situations, both Tara and Jeannette paved their way into the world despite the environmental factors trying to prevent them.

The two lenses used while discussing these memoirs—historical and psychoanalytical—allows an additional insight into the stories of Tara and Jeannette. They give an intimate look into the woman's lives as children growing up in poverty and with dysfunctional parents, as well as gives context to their perspectives of certain stories and events within their lifetime. The historical lens allows an insight into historical events depicted through Tara or Jeannette's memories. The poverty lines illustrate the state of the economy during their dysfunctional times spent with their families. By using the psychoanalytical lens, assumptions can be made on why certain individuals act or react the way they do in the memoirs. Mental illnesses are complex matters requiring multiple insights in order to get a semi-clear picture. In this case, the psychoanalytical lens used to study Jeannette's psychological trauma and Tara's familial psyches gives a deeper understanding of the underlying issues facing the two memoirists.

Studying both *The Glass Castle* and *Educated* allowed a unique insight into the impoverishment many families face every day. Jeannette and Tara both finished on a positive note when it came to ending their memoirs. They expand upon what might be considered a

universal idea, one that suggests that they—and others who are faced with economic and psychological struggles—will always exist between turbulence and order when it comes to their families. Although they may have preferred an alternate lifestyle out of poverty, they look into the future after learning what they have experienced in the past and recognize the wisdom they have gained from their unconventional situations. A wisdom unique to them. A wisdom that has catapulted them into the women they are today.

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